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SUBJECT: MFA POLICY PLANNER SEES YEARS OF VIOLENCE AHEAD IN IRAQ, LITTLE CHANCE OF DISARMING HIZBALLAH IN LEBANON

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Christian Nakhle, head of the Middle East and North Africa cell at the Centre d'Analyse et de Prévision (i.e., the "CAP," the Quai's S/P-equivalent), shared his views of Lebanon and Iraq with NEA Watcher on 11/3. Nakhle, whose analyses are distributed within the MFA but do not constitute official policy, was uniformly pessimistic on Iraq. Noting the existence of several layers of violence (jihadist, neo-Baathist, inter-communal), he assessed that at each level events were trending in a negative direction that would take years to reverse. The closest historical parallel was the Lebanese civil war, which continued until all parties were exhausted. He suggested that a similar state of exhaustion might prove to be a prerequisite for any true reconciliation between Iraq's major ethnic groups, although it could take more than a decade before the groups reached that point.

¶2. (C) Moreover, Nakhle judged that Iraq's neighbors were generally content with a violent status quo that served their sundry interests. Iran, for example, was happy to see the U.S. bogged down in a conflict that provided Tehran leverage in its standoff with the UNSC. Similarly, in his analysis Egypt and Saudi Arabia were content with a degree of chaos that diverted Washington's attention from the President's Freedom Agenda and that dampened the Arab appetite for democratization -- though both countries feared the eventual repercussions of homegrown jihadists returning from Iraq.

¶3. (C) Turning to Lebanon, Nakhle based his analysis on two premises: First, Lebanon's Christian community had lost faith in the West and was therefore (like General Michel Aoun) betting on an alliance with the Shia (and specifically Hizballah) to protect the community's interests; second,

Hizballah was succeeding at selling itself within Lebanon as a Lebanese institution rather than as a puppet of Iran and Syria. Consequently, Nakhle deemed it "impossible" for the Hariri bloc to split General Aoun away from Hizballah (and Syria) during the next few years.

¶4. (C) In addition, Nakhle predicted that the disarmament of Hizballah -- as called for in UNSCRs 1559 and 1701 -- would not happen because the political and military costs of that disarmament were prohibitive. "The IDF did not disarm Hizballah, not because it was impossible, but because the cost was too high. If that was true for the IDF, it is even more so for UNIFIL," he said. As for the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), Nakhle said there was no chance of the LAF disarming Hizballah given the reluctance of Lebanon's Sunni and Christian communities to make the inevitable political concessions that would be required to secure Hizballah's acquiescence. "It would be the death of the Taif Accord," said Nakhle, who claimed most Lebanese preferred an armed but politically quiescent Hizballah to a disarmed Hizballah with a dominant position in the Lebanese parliament. According to Nakhle, the international community had yet to come to terms with the inconvenient truth that most Lebanese Sunnis and Christians simply did not want to see Hizballah disarmed.

¶5. (C) Comment: Nakhle, whose 15-year career in the MFA has encompassed four year tours in both Jerusalem and Cairo, said he enjoyed the freedom that the CAP affords him to provide analysis ostensibly unfettered by policy constraints. He seemed particularly enamored of the notion that the U.S. should not continue to disaggregate its policies, on Iraq, Lebanon, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but should instead recognize that Arab public opinion had created strong linkages between these disparate crises -- linkages which made it difficult to achieve meaningful progress on any given front without simultaneous progress on the others. In this, as with his analysis of Iraq and Lebanon, we suspect he does not stray too far from the unspoken consensus at the Quai.

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